

Meetings 10

Conduct Regular Meetings

It is up to you to determine whether it makes sense to hold meetings annual, quarterly or monthly. Your community's goals should help in this determination. Regular and predictable meetings will help your association and membership stay involved and focused on the organization's goals.

Conduct Successful Meetings

Your conduct of association meetings matters. Efficient and organized meetings will help attract participants and keep them engaged.

The following is a checklist to foster a positive meeting.

- ***Select a neutral place to meet***, such as a school or library meeting room, Mid-County Regional Service Center, or a local restaurant.
- ***Prepare and post an agenda***
- ***Clearly state the purpose of your meeting on the agenda***
- ***Start and end on time***
- ***Keep the meeting moving and watch the general flow***
- ***Encourage participation***
- ***Summarize the conversation frequently***
- ***Stress cooperation, not conflict***
- ***Summarize decisions reached***
- ***Point out differences not yet resolved***
- ***State ideas positively and show their relation to the overall issue***

Tips

Robert's Rules provides for constructive and democratic meetings, to help, not hinder, the business of the Board.

Under no circumstances should "undue strictness" be allowed to intimidate members or limit full participation.

For more information about Roberts Rules online, visit: www.robertsrules.org.

"Roberts Rules has been a great way to keep our meetings on track while allowing everyone a chance to state their opinions."

~ Ilaya Rome-Hopkins, East Bethesda

- ***Use consistent rules – such as Roberts Rules of Order – to add structure to deliberations***
- ***Outline future actions and get commitments for follow through***
- ***Set the next meeting date, time and place.***

When you find yourself chairing or facilitating a community meeting, the ability to express yourself in a clear and concise manner is important. Listening, however, can be even more important.

Both speaking and listening are skills that everyone involved in the group should master, especially those in leadership positions.

Speak Effectively

The most respected members of a group are often the best speakers. They are able to get an idea across to a group of people without dominating the meeting or rambling.

Here are tips to help improve your speaking ability:

- ***Know what you want to say.*** Outline your main points on a piece of paper before you speak. Use the outline as a guide to help you be more focused.
- ***Keep it short and to the point.***
- ***Speak clearly and project your voice outward.***
- ***Practice your speech.*** Try practicing your presentation in front of your mirror at home.
- ***Be Concise.*** Focus on one or two central ideas in your speech.
- ***Make eye contact with the audience.***
- ***Avoid distractions.*** Avoid words like “um,” “ah,” “kinda” and “you know”. Also avoid playing with your hair or glasses or jingling your keys.

Listen to Others

A successful community leader works at listening to other individual's concerns. They focus on not just the words being spoken, but what those words mean.

This skill takes practice and hard work. The guidelines below may help you to improve your listening skills:

- ***Listen for the unfamiliar.***
- ***Rephrase important points in your own words.*** This will allow the speaker to clarify the statement if there has been a misunderstanding.

- ***Pay attention to details.*** Details are important in communication, especially if the membership differs significantly on the issue.
- ***Be open minded about new ideas and opinions.***
- ***Allow speakers to complete their ideas or opinions without interruption.***
- ***If you are not clear on terms being used, ask the speaker to define them.***

Practice Active Listening

Active listening is making a conscious effort to hear, analyze, assign meaning to and respond to what another person is saying. Successful active listening can be exhausting, but will help build confidence that you care about what's important to your members.

Steps to becoming an effective active listener include:

- ***Focus on the Speaker.*** Establish—and keep—eye and face contact with the speaker. Reinforce what is being said is being heard through non-verbal facial expressions. To paraphrase an old saying, good listeners are like poor boxers: they lead with their faces.
- ***Use Receptive Language.*** Follow and encourage the speaker's train of thought by using receptive language; e.g., "I see," "Hmmm," "Un huh," etc.
- ***Listen for Key Words.*** It takes continuous action to focus on the essence of the information being shared. The listener's mind should be actively gathering, sorting, sifting, evaluating, synthesizing, and ordering the data.
- ***Respond.*** Verify with the speaker about the essence of what was said, especially if the thought is being captured on a flipchart or electronically for future reference. Ask questions for clarity but be cautious that the questions are not leading. Never, unless expressly requested, give an opinion on the presented information.